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President: Mr. Han Seung-soo ..... (Republic of Korea)

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Agenda item 42 *(continued)*

The situation in the Middle East

Mr. Fedotov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): For more than half a century, the General Assembly has devoted continuing and focused attention to the question of the Middle East. Regrettably, however, we have to acknowledge that during this lengthy period, the Middle East has remained in a state of serious crisis. Just as a half century ago, its epicentre remains the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Almost every day the international community is confronted with images of terrorist acts, which are then followed by reprisals. The peace-loving population suffers and acts of destruction proliferate, further destabilizing the Palestinian territories and the region as a whole. Current realities are such that the peaceful dialogue between Palestinians and Israelis has been set back, and the peace process, which has been the subject of extremely intensive efforts since the Madrid Conference, has been brought to a standstill.

These developments are a source of serious concern for Russia. From the onset of the conflict, Russia, as a co-sponsor of the Middle East peace process, has been working actively to stabilize the situation and to breathe new life into the process of working towards a comprehensive regional settlement. That question has been at the centre of the continuing and focused attention of the President of Russia, Mr. Putin, and of its Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Ivanov, who maintains contacts with the Israeli and Palestinian authorities, the Secretary-General, as well as his counterparts in the United States, the States of the European Union and the Arab countries. A special envoy of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs is in the region on an ongoing basis, and, together with other international mediators from the United States, the European Union and the United Nations, is working intensively and tirelessly with the parties to the conflict.

Important impetus was given to this work by the meeting in New York this month of the Foreign Ministers of Russia and the United States with the European Union and the Secretary-General.

The problem of the Middle East settlement was one of the major issues of concern in the context of the November American-Russian summit. The Presidents of Russia and of the United States, at the conclusion of their talks, issued a joint statement on the Middle East setting forth some general approaches to a settlement of the numerous problems facing the region. Russia believes in this respect that the basic thrust of diplomatic efforts should be to enable the immediate launching of the process of implementing those agreements already reached between the Palestinians and the Israelis. Russia believes also that the settlement should be based on the recommendations of the Mitchell report, whose implementation would make it possible to put an end to the violent confrontation between the Israelis and the Palestinians, to stop the

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violence, to adopt confidence-building measures and to relaunch the peace process. The Government of the Palestinian National Authority should be decisive in preventing extremist acts, and the Government of Israel should complete its withdrawal of troops from Palestinian cities, remove the blockades, lift the financial embargo and carry out other steps to normalize the situation, including imposing a complete freeze on settlements.

We are convinced that by implementing these steps it will be possible for talks to begin again on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), the Madrid principles for the settlement of the Middle East question and the formula of land for peace. A firm settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli question should include ending the occupation, creating a viable Palestinian State and providing genuine security for Israel and Palestine on an equal footing. A just solution to the problems of Jerusalem and the refugees should be sought within an international legal framework.

The events of 11 September this year have had a profound effect on the structure of international relations as a whole. As far as the situation in the Middle East is concerned, they have made more urgent the task of achieving immediately a comprehensive peace settlement. However, the attainment of that goal will not be possible without the development of a comprehensive approach to the resolution of various problems in the area, in particular ensuring a revival of the talks on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks of the peace process. Genuine peace in the Middle East will be impossible without a constructive dialogue between Israel and Syria, the result of which should be the return to Syria of the Golan Heights and the establishment of normal relations between the two States. For its part, Russia will continue to work actively to overcome the crisis and to reinvigorate the peace process in the Middle East.

Mr. Al-Sameen (Oman) (*spoke in Arabic*): I should like at the outset to tell you once again, Mr. President, how much my delegation appreciates your wisdom and skills in guiding our discussion during this fifty-sixth session of the General Assembly, which we are sure will achieve the positive results to which we all aspire.

The situation in the Middle East is one of the major challenges that we are facing at the beginning of this new millennium. On the question of Palestine, the international community believes that the peace process that began in 1991 in Madrid is the most important and serious initiative designed to bring to an end a situation that has continued for decades and wasted an enormous amount of human energy. The Madrid outcome was itself the result of relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions aimed at the achievement of peace based on the principle of land for peace. All these measures reflected the commitment of the parties involved, and they must not now call their own efforts into doubt.

My Government has long been keenly concerned about moving peace forward, convinced that peace alone can guarantee progress and prosperity for humankind. My country therefore gave its blessing to the Camp David agreements between the Egyptian Arab Republic and Israel in 1979. Indeed, we supported the Madrid Peace Conference in 1991 for the same reason. We also supported the outcome of that Conference and the resultant agreements. We consider them to be a historic achievement, contributing to the prevention of bloodshed and opening the way to cooperation among the peoples of the region.

Furthermore, my country has been involved in ambitious efforts and actions to move the peace process forward and has been actively involved in multilateral negotiations. We organized a regional conference on water resources and exchanged representative offices with the Palestinian National Authority, and we have established trade ties with Israel. We were optimistic in the first half of the 1990s, when a period began that we believed would put an end to all forms of the conflict and would propel the pace of progress towards peace in a significant way. Agreements had been reached and others were on their way, and major progress was also made on the Syrian-Israeli track.

Yet the expectations were not met, because of Israel's unjustified attempt to backtrack. The agreements signed with the Palestinian side were quibbled over, and the result is the situation that we are facing now in the Middle East. It is clear that Mr. Ariel Sharon, the current Prime Minister of Israel, does not want peace to come about in the region. Israel's actions — the massacres and assassinations it has carried out, the destruction of the economic infrastructure in the occupied Palestinian areas, the expansion of the settlements, the occupation of Orient House and the expulsion of Palestinians from their

homes — make it very clear that Israel does not truly want peace.

We understand that the path to peace will not always be easy. There will be many obstacles along the way as the process unfolds, given the many complications and the divergence of views between the parties. The Arab-Israeli conflict has continued for over half a century and has involved a number of different struggles and entrenched many political, mental and psychological barriers. Israel has clearly brought the process to a standstill, which we do not understand and cannot accept. Resolution 181 (II), adopted by the General Assembly in 1947, was designed to put an end to the Palestinian British mandate in two phases, creating both a Jewish and a Palestinian Arab State. Other Security Council and General Assembly resolutions followed. Notwithstanding those resolutions, the Palestinian people continue to be deprived of the chance to exercise even their most basic human rights — as guaranteed by the United Nations Charter — including the right to self-determination and to the creation of an independent State on their own territory.

We believe that the United Nations has historical responsibilities with regard to ensuring a just and lasting peace in the Middle East in accordance with the provisions of the United Nations Charter and relevant legally binding resolutions. These responsibilities include pursuing the peace process in accordance with international resolutions, in particular Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), and on the basis of the principle of land for peace, and ending all measures taken by the Israeli Government to change the geographic and demographic character of Al-Quds. Security Council resolution 465 (1980) declares the Israeli settlements to be null and void and calls for dismantling them.

Finally, a just solution must be found to the problem of the Palestinian refugees, based on General Assembly 194 (III), adopted in 1948. We must also ensure respect for the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention and support Syria's call for a resumption of negotiations from where they were left off, with the aim of ensuring the return to Syria of the occupied Syrian Golan and a return to 4 June 1967 borders. This, in turn, will require the return to Lebanon of the Shebaa farms.

We consider the declaration of United States President George W. Bush with regard to the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, as well as what United States Secretary of State Colin Powell said concerning the establishment of a Palestinian State and putting an end to Israeli occupation and settlements, to be encouraging steps. We expect a response from Israel to these declarations that aim also at reactivating the peace process. The European Union has made similar statements and efforts designed to promote the peace process and stop the spiral of violence and bloodshed. A well-defined variety of instruments and tools must all be brought to bear, on the basis of a specific timetable.

We support all the efforts of the United Nations to fight acts of international terrorism, such as those that recently struck the United States. This must not be accomplished, however, at the expense of the suffering of the peoples of the Middle East, particularly the Palestinian people.

Mr. De Loecker (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU). The Central and Eastern European countries associated with the European Union, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia; the associated countries of Cyprus, Malta and Turkey; and Iceland, the European Free Trade Association country belonging to the European Economic Area, associate themselves with this statement.

The situation in the Middle East remains very grave and, as we are all aware, presents serious risks to regional stability. I do not want to recount here the tragic events continuing to unfold in the occupied Palestinian territories, as the EU has already spoken at length on that subject in the debate on the question of Palestine. At that time, we once again pointed out that negotiation is the only way to achieve a definitive settlement of the Palestinian question.

In the context of the peace process, a certain progress has been achieved that needs to be preserved and built upon. In particular, we have in mind the Madrid Conference principles, especially that of land for peace, and Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), as well as the agreements signed by the parties and the progress made in previous negotiations.

The quest for peace is primarily a matter for the parties themselves to pursue through negotiations on all components of final status, including the prospect of a just and viable solution to the issues of Jerusalem and refugees, as well as economic support for the Palestinian population. In order to find a way out of the sad current situation, we once more call on the Israeli and Palestinian sides to ensure full, immediate and unqualified implementation, without conditions, of the recommendations contained in the Mitchell report and the Tenet plan. No one can win using this logic of confrontation and violence. The parties must return without delay to the path of dialogue and negotiation.

In Lebanon, a major development emerged last year with Israel's withdrawal from the south of the country. At that time, the EU noted with satisfaction the Israeli Government's decision, which was in accordance with Security Council resolution 425 (1978). The Union commended the successive steps that helped restore stability in the area, a necessary condition for reconstruction and development. The EU remains ready to contribute to the reconstruction effort in the area, as it has done constantly for Lebanon as a whole.

To realize these objectives, it is essential that the Lebanese Government, in accordance with Security Council resolution 1365 (2001), take further measures to re-establish its authority effectively throughout the south, particularly by deploying Lebanese armed forces. In addition, the parties must continue to honour their commitment to respect scrupulously the withdrawal line mapped out by the United Nations, and must show the utmost restraint and cooperate fully with the United Nations and the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). In this connection, UNIFIL can count on the European Union's full support in carrying out its task of restoring international peace and security.

The progress made in Lebanon does not in itself, however, resolve the broader problem of the peace process in the region. The European Union would like to reiterate that the quest for a comprehensive, lasting peace in the region requires that due account be taken of the Israeli-Syrian and Israeli-Lebanese tracks in the conflict, resolution of which has to be based on the Madrid Conference principles, particularly that of land for peace, and Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). We call on the parties to resume negotiations on that basis as soon as circumstances permit.

The European Union reaffirms its commitment to respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all States in the region. It also reiterates that it regards the establishment of settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories and the Golan Heights as illegal and contrary to international law.

The Union is determined to work for the reactivation of the multilateral track of the peace process as soon as conditions are favourable. It attaches particular importance to the Regional Economic Development Working Group, for which it acts as coordinator. Regional cooperation will enable the economic, ecological and demographic challenges of the coming years best to be addressed. It was in that spirit that the Union adopted, at Santa Maria da Feira, its common strategy with regard to the Mediterranean region. This included, inter alia, a statement of its conviction that the successful conclusion of the Middle East peace process on all its tracks, and the resolution of other conflicts in the region, are important prerequisites for peace and stability in the Mediterranean region. Given its interests in the region and its close and long-standing relations with the region's constituent countries, the EU aspires to play its full part in bringing about stability and development in the Middle East. The cooperation already initiated within the framework of Barcelona process is a determining factor in laying the foundations for the post-peace era in the region.

The Euro-Mediterranean Conference recently held in Brussels on 5 and 6 November 2001 showed once again the commitment of all partners to the Barcelona process as the essential and favoured framework for dialogue and cooperation between the European Union and the countries on the southern and eastern sides of the Mediterranean. The Barcelona vision remains as topical as ever.

In conclusion, the European Union would like to reaffirm its strong commitment to a just, durable and comprehensive peace based on the relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions and the principles of the Madrid Middle East Peace Conference. The EU remains prepared to do its utmost to achieve a peaceful, prosperous future in the Middle East.

Mr. Ahmad (Pakistan): Yesterday, we commemorated the International Day of Solidarity with

the Palestinian people. It is only befitting that we started our debate to coincide with this occasion. It was a day of reflection and resolve — reflection, because it has been 54 years that the Palestinian people have remained deprived of their inalienable rights, to which they are entitled under the Charter of the United Nations and other international conventions; resolve, because the Palestinian people, in spite of the tremendous odds against them, continue to persist in their just and courageous struggle for self-determination. I reaffirm today before this Assembly the unswerving and unflinching support of the Government and people of Pakistan for the Palestinian cause.

I remember standing here at this very rostrum exactly one year ago, expressing my hopes and my fears on the situation in the Middle East. Unfortunately, it is what I feared, rather than what I hoped for, that has now come to pass. Instead of beginning a new century with the promise of peace in the Middle East, we have witnessed the alarming slide of the region into a vicious cycle of spiralling violence, which has claimed hundreds of innocent lives. Today, the glimmer of hope for some progress in the peace process that we saw last year, unfortunately, is beset by the haze and uncertainty of the current situation in Palestine.

We share the deep concern of the international community over Israel's policy of the use of excessive force, indiscriminate attacks against unarmed Palestinian civilians and targeted assassinations of Palestinian leaders and activists. Israeli incursions into territories controlled by the Palestinian National Authority, the expansion of illegal Israeli settlements, the unwarranted seizure of Orient House and Palestinian offices in Jerusalem last August and the unabated violence committed by Israeli security forces in key Palestinian cities have gravely undermined the Oslo peace process.

The Israeli policy of economic blockade has debilitated the Palestinian economy. The situation has been further compounded by the large-scale destruction of Palestinian infrastructure and other repressive measures, leaving large numbers of Palestinians without jobs or even shelter.

It is the responsibility of the international community, and especially of the United Nations, to attain a fair, just and comprehensive settlement of the Palestinian question in all its aspects. Regrettably, it is the international community's inability to tackle the problem at its roots, either in Palestine or elsewhere, that is the main reason for the perpetuation of such conflicts. The horrific results, which include the deaths of innocent people, including women and children, are clear for all to see. The remedy is also clear. The international community must remove the injustice that perpetuates the conflict and restore to the Palestinian people their inalienable right to self-determination. The United Nations must implement its own resolutions.

At the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, a long time ago, President Woodrow Wilson of the United States of America said that

> "National aspirations must be respected; peoples may now be ... governed only by their consent. 'Self-determination' is not a mere phrase; it is an imperative principle of action."

This pronouncement still holds true today and patterns of repression cannot be justified simply because they are familiar. We cannot use the plea that there is no alternative. If we are earnest and sincere in our intentions, then peace, stability and the settlement of disputes are the real alternatives. The repression of an occupied people, just like terrorism, needs to be condemned and tackled in all its forms and manifestation. These fundamentals must always be stated and often repeated.

Offers of dialogue and peace should not be left to the generosity of the occupying Power. They must be made a matter of law and right. The international community must play its due role to ensure the just and durable settlement of long-standing disputes involving the destiny of a people. If the question of East Timor could be so successfully resolved, why can the international community not be adroit enough to take similar action in other parts of the world where peoples continue to be denied their inalienable right to self-determination, in violation of universally acknowledged principles and the decisions of the Security Council?

The situation in Palestine warrants urgent remedial actions necessitating immediate steps by the international community, the first of which must be to address the problem of the security of the Palestinian people. This is indispensable to halting the unending cycle of violence. Efforts must also be made to bring an end to coercive measures, which constitute serious breaches of the Oslo peace accords and run contrary to

the assurances given to the brokers of the Middle East peace in 1993 that the activities of the Palestinian institutions would not be hampered.

Peace cannot be achieved by binding a weaker party to agreements while allowing the stronger one a free hand. The deteriorating situation in Palestine demands active intervention by the international community to end the violence and oversee the implementation of commitments made and agreements signed. The international community, particularly the guarantors of the peace process, must also use their influence and good offices to ensure full Israeli compliance with the peace agreements and with its legal obligations and responsibilities as an occupying Power under the Fourth Geneva Convention of 12 August 1949.

Pakistan has steadfastly and unequivocally supported the just struggle for the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, as it supports those of all other peoples who remain subjugated by similar alien occupation and foreign domination. We have consistently stated that Security Council resolutions must be implemented without discrimination between regions and peoples. Those States which are in violation of such resolutions and are using State terrorism to trample upon the inalienable right to self-determination of the people under their occupation must be held accountable.

There can be no lasting peace in the Middle East without the attainment of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people. These include the return of all occupied territories to the control of the Palestinian Authority, the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, with holy Jerusalem as its capital, and the exercise of their full sovereignty over Al-Haram Al-Sharif.

Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) continue to provide a viable and just framework for a durable and comprehensive peace in the Middle East. A settlement of the Middle East question must, by definition, also include the restoration of the Syrian Golan and full respect for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Lebanon. A durable peace in the Middle East is simply not possible in the absence of justice. We therefore agree with the Secretary-General that there can be no lasting security without lasting peace and lasting peace can be ensured only by adhering to the principles of justice and international law.

Pakistan unequivocally supports the international calls for restraining Israel from aggravating an already tense situation in the Middle East and urges the resumption of negotiations leading to a just, durable and comprehensive peace settlement consistent with United Nations resolutions and the legitimate national rights of the Palestinian people. This is the key to a permanent peace in the Middle East.

Finally, let me state that the twenty-first century did not begin on 1 January this year. It began in 1989, when the Berlin Wall came down and the Iron Curtain fell, letting the people of Eastern Europe enjoy the right of freedom. Unfortunately, some of the chapters of the last century, written in the blood of innocent people, are yet to be closed. It is time now for the international community to uphold its moral and legal obligations under the Charter. Those who have the power and the responsibility to maintain international peace and enforce international law must now act to complete the unfinished agenda of the previous century. Let those who remain deprived of freedom and inalienable rights enjoy them. Let those who have long cherished the desire for freedom taste it. Let those who are still denied their right to self-determination, whether in Palestine or in Kashmir, be finally given the opportunity to exercise and realize it.

Mr. Lancry (Israel): One year ago, I addressed this Assembly and described how history was giving birth to a new epoch in the Middle East. Today, we are experiencing the labour pains of that new era.

We are in the throes of a revolution in the ways that the peoples, nations and religions of the Middle East relate to one another. And revolutions are painful, traumatic experiences. To reap the fruits of these new modes of interaction and the manifold possibilities of our brave new age, we must labour against the rejectionism that emerges from the depths of the violent extremist ideologies that have caused us all immeasurable suffering. Beyond the present grief and pain for which they are responsible, we retain our hope and our vision for a more peaceful and prosperous future.

Indeed, we cannot permit ourselves to forget the enormous progress we have made over the past generation in ending long-standing conflicts and opening the door to greater tolerance and coexistence in the Middle East. Israel has concluded peace treaties with two of our neighbours, Egypt and Jordan; we have

strengthened our relations with other States in the region; and the Oslo peace process initiated an historic process of reconciliation with our Palestinian neighbours.

And though the past year has been a tremendous and heart-wrenching setback, the path forward remains open to us and to all the peoples of the region. Our history has repeatedly shown us the futility of war and conflict. The only way to achieve a future of peace, stability and opportunity is through dialogue conducted in an atmosphere free from terrorism, hatred, demonization and incitement.

While we have made progress in certain areas and with certain countries, others remain fixated on fighting wars that have long since ended and on stoking prejudices that have no place in the civilized world. It is most unfortunate that, more than 50 years after Israel's establishment and despite the great strides we have made towards peace and integration with our neighbours in the region, certain regimes continue to cultivate those dark forces of rejection so as to perpetuate a useless and futile conflict with us.

Along our northern border, the Government of Lebanon clings to its position that continuing aggression against Israel and its failure to comply with the will of the international community are somehow legitimate. In May 2000, Israel unilaterally withdrew its forces from southern Lebanon, in full compliance with Security Council resolution 425 (1978). Israel's fulfilment of its responsibilities under resolution 425 (1978) was confirmed by the Secretary-General and subsequently endorsed by the Security Council and has been repeatedly referred to, for example, in Security Council resolutions 1310 (2000) and 1337 (2001). The responsibility now falls to the Government of Lebanon to fulfil its remaining responsibilities under resolution 425 (1978), namely, the deployment of its armed forces up to the Blue Line so as to reinstate its effective authority in the southern region and to restore peace and security in the area.

Although Israel had hoped that its withdrawal from Lebanon would motivate the Lebanese Government to ensure peace and security on the border, as is its obligation under international law, this has not been the case. The terrorist organization Hezbollah continues its aggression against Israel through cross-border attacks with mortars, missiles and rockets; the abduction and murder of Israeli soldiers and civilians; border incursions; and road-side bombs.

Last October, Hezbollah abducted and murdered three Israeli soldiers patrolling the Israeli side of the Blue Line. This October, Hezbollah twice launched major unprovoked assaults on Israel, using mortars and anti-tank shells. Both the Secretary-General and the Security Council have clearly rejected any suggestion that the use of force by Hezbollah, or any terrorist organization, is a legitimate substitute for the peaceful resolution of disputes. If there is any need for further evidence of this principle, resolutions 1373 (2001) and 1377 (2001) reaffirm that no State can allow its territory to be used as a base for cross-border terrorist attacks.

The Secretary-General himself made the following observations in his report of 22 January 2001:

> "The greatest cause of concern ... were the attacks across the Blue Line in the Shebaa farms area, which were deliberate acts in ... breach of the decisions of the Security Council." (*S/2001/66, para. 18*)

> "The simplest and most direct way to ensure calm in the area is for the parties to act in accordance with the decisions of the Security Council ... This implies that the Government of Lebanon asserts its effective authority and maintains law and order throughout its territory up to the line identified by the United Nations. That is its right and duty, consistently upheld by the Security Council and paid for with the lives of United Nations soldiers." (*ibid., para. 19*)

Israel has repeatedly called upon the Government of Lebanon to fulfil its obligations under international law, as required in resolution 425 (1978) and subsequent resolutions. Despite those pleas, the Government of Lebanon has failed to restrain Hezbollah. To the contrary, Lebanon has effectively granted control of southern Lebanon to Hezbollah, a situation that gives that organization free rein to train terrorists and to organize and perpetrate lethal terrorist attacks at will.

A continuation of the present situation carries with it a danger of escalation that could further imperil the safety and security of civilians on both sides of the Blue Line. The only way to avoid such a situation is for

Lebanon to act immediately to fulfil its responsibilities under resolutions 425 (1978) and 1310 (2000), and adhere to the stipulations of resolution 1373 (2001) regarding the suppression of terrorism and terrorist organizations, thereby bringing its policies into accord with the directives of the United Nations and the will of the international community. For a country that speaks so loudly and so often about the importance of international legitimacy, Lebanon would be well served to heed not only the calls of the international community, but those of its own high-minded rhetoric as well.

When addressing the threat to peace and stability posed by terrorism, one cannot ignore the fact that terrorist organizations are capable of acting as they do only because they are supported, encouraged, financed and harboured by States. In the case of Hezbollah, that support comes from other regimes in the Middle East, namely the Governments of Syria and the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The Government of Syria plays a crucial role in facilitating Hezbollah's continuing aggression against Israel. Syria allows Hezbollah to maintain training facilities in the Syrian-controlled Bekaa Valley, and grants its terrorists safe harbour on Syrian territory. Damascus remains the primary transit point for arms transfers to Hezbollah's operatives in the field.

Syria also permits numerous other terrorist organizations to maintain their headquarters in Damascus, including Ahmad Jibril's Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine — General Command, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. The Palestinian terrorist organization Hamas was allowed to open a new main office in Damascus in March. These organizations have proudly claimed responsibility for scores of terrorist attacks against Israel over the years, including yesterday's suicide bus bombing near Pardes Hannah and Tuesday's shooting rampage in Afula. Many of those organizations also maintain training facilities in the Bekaa Valley and receive aid and logistical support from the Syrian Government.

It is particularly distressing that Syrian support for anti-Israel terror has continued even as the world has united to combat the common threat of terrorism, even as Syria has participated in peace negotiations aimed at ending the long-standing state of war between our two countries, and even as Syria was elected a non-permanent member of the Security Council.

The most recent attempts to conclude a comprehensive peace on the basis of the framework established at the Madrid Peace Conference were the meetings between former Prime Minister Barak and Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk Al-Shara' held in Shepherdstown, West Virginia, in January 2000. The Syrian side broke off those talks after Israel presented an extensive offer for territorial compromise.

Nevertheless, only days ago Foreign Minister Shimon Peres publicly stated Israel's readiness to resume negotiations with Syria, immediately and without preconditions, on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

The Islamic Republic of Iran has long been the primary supporter of Hezbollah, and has had a supporting role in that organization's attacks not only on northern Israel, but also on Jewish and Israeli targets around the world, including the bombings of the Israeli Embassy and Jewish community centre in Buenos Aires.

As is widely known, Iran also actively supports, finances, arms and trains terrorists sent to attack Israel by the Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Hamas organizations. Iran is also actively pursuing the acquisition and construction of a non-conventional weapon strike capability, including chemical, biological and nuclear weapons. Estimates give Iran several years until it fields nuclear weapons, but chemical weapons have already been used by Iran in retaliation for similar use by Iraq.

With the Shihab-3 long-range missile, a weapon with a 1,300-kilometre range, Iran has the capacity to reach Israeli cities. When it was paraded through the streets of Tehran in September of 1998, the inscription on the missile carrier declared "Israel should be wiped off the map". Given Iran's naked hostility towards a sovereign State, its weapons build-up must be a matter of concern to the international community as a whole.

Relations between Israel and Iran have not always been like this. However, since the overthrow of the Shah and the branding of Israel as the "Small Satan", Iranian officials have continually called for jihad and the destruction of the State of Israel. The language of Iran's leaders reflects a total negation of Israel that transcends any difference there may be over our

respective foreign policies. The Iranian press has also praised terrorist attacks against Israel, including the attack on the Dolphinarium nightclub in Tel Aviv, where 23 young people were massacred.

Meanwhile, on Iran's doorstep sits Iraq, a country that not only nurtures terrorism in order to conduct a war by proxy, but also feels perfectly comfortable perpetrating atrocities on its own. Iraq's regional aspirations and its motivation to acquire weapons of mass destruction are as strong as ever. Iraq has persisted in its attempts to develop non-conventional weapons and their means of delivery, much of this below the radar of international arms inspectors, who have been denied access to monitor Iraq's weapons programme for more than three years.

This is particularly troubling in the light of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's repeated hostile declarations against Israel and other nations and his proven enthusiasm for firing missiles at civilian populations in Israel, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and even against his own citizens. Even today, Iraq continues to level unprovoked threats against the State of Israel.

Iraq's continuing rejection of Israel's right to exist, its history of aggression and non-compliance with United Nations resolutions, its capabilities in chemical, biological and nuclear weapons and its lack of compunction in attacking civilian targets underscore the continuing threat it poses to the people of the region. The international community must continue to strenuously pressure Iraq in order to guarantee its compliance with international law and to ensure that it does not possess the capability to threaten regional security.

The desire for peace with our neighbours represents the supreme goal of the State of Israel and its citizens. Since 1948, Israel has demonstrated a willingness to make compromises in pursuit of peace and to constantly search for new peacemaking initiatives.

As our Foreign Minister eloquently described in his statement before the general debate just a few weeks ago, the world is changing before our eyes. New opportunities await all nations with the courage to embrace them. The territorial conflicts of the past are meaningless in a world where we are so tightly connected, so intimately interdependent and where we are quickly becoming, in a very real sense, united nations.

Israel's vision of peace is one of clearly defined borders that would eliminate territorial disputes, of a regional security framework that would curb the threat posed by extremists and reduce the need for States to expend copious amounts of resources to ensure their defence. We envision a future in which all peoples are free to determine their own destiny in mutual dignity and security. We envision a peace that would improve the lives of all the peoples of the Middle East and that could open the door to economic growth and foreign investment.

But as tantalizingly close as this bold new cooperative world may appear, a vast ocean still divides us. The primary threat that separates the Middle East from the incredible opportunities of our age is the threat of terrorism bred by violent fundamentalist ideologies, many of them breeding just beyond Israel's border. Only by denouncing these ideologies and eradicating the terrorist organizations that espouse them can we hope to engage in meaningful and productive dialogue that will open the Middle East to the possibilities that await it and provide a better future for the peoples of the region.

On 11 September, the world awoke to a reality that has plagued Israel for decades, the reality of State-sponsored terrorist aggression. In the aftermath of those horrific attacks, the world discovered things that Israel has long understood: that terrorism poses a threat to all free peoples, that terror knows no borders, nationality, race or religion, that terror can exist only with the support and complicity of States and that fighting terror means waging an unrelenting and uncompromising campaign.

Israel has been on the front lines of this campaign since its very inception. Indeed, in our region terrorists continue to arm themselves, clerics continue to inspire them, and certain regimes continue to encourage them, all with aim of preventing peace and coexistence from taking root in the Middle East.

Terrorism is the primary threat of the new millennium. The attempts by the United Nations and certain concerned nations to facilitate the resolution of long-standing conflicts and animosities in the Middle East will be hamstrung if they do not address terror. And if we do not resolutely address terror, the Middle East peace process will not be the only victim.

Peace in the Middle East need not be a dream, and endless confrontation need not be our only reality.

But in order to reach peace, there must be an unshakeable commitment — both ethical and political — to non-violence, to ending terror and to embracing dialogue and negotiations. This is a commitment that must be assumed by the regional leadership for the sake of future generations. Surely, if this commitment is made, the triumph of peace, a true peace, will be the triumph for all people in the Middle East and for all generations to come.

Mr. Listre (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): Ten years ago, in October 1991, the delegations participating in the Madrid Peace Conference undertook to work on the quest for a peaceful and negotiated solution to the conflict in the Middle East.

In subsequent negotiations, Israel and the Palestinian Authority recognized their mutual political rights and accepted the principle of a peaceful coexistence lived in dignity and security. They also committed themselves to negotiating a just, lasting and comprehensive settlement of their differences. Both parties thus accepted the principle that peace and reconciliation could be achieved only through a process of diplomatic negotiations and not by means of violence.

In sharp contrast to those commitments and praiseworthy aspirations, in the last 14 months the Middle East has again been submerged in an escalation of violence that puts at risk the achievements made since the Madrid Peace Conference.

As a result of the intensification of fighting thousands of Palestinians and Israelis have been killed or wounded. I would like to reiterate on this occasion the heartfelt condolences of the Argentine people and Government to the families of all the victims, whom global television brings to us every night on the news programmes.

Recently, the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process stated that the situation in the region was the worst it has been in the last 10 years. This statement is a demonstration of the extreme seriousness of the current situation and of the urgency of avoiding the abyss of a widespread conflict throughout the region.

There is no doubt that the Middle East must rediscover an outlook oriented towards peace. Israelis, Palestinians and the international community cannot let the logic of violence prevail, the suffering of innocent civilians continue or the hatred between the peoples deepen. The cost of indifference is very high in terms of human lives.

At the recent general debate of the General Assembly, the President of the Argentine Republic, Fernando de la Rúa, reaffirmed my country's traditional support for achieving a stable and lasting peace in the Middle East, based on the respect for the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and to establish an independent State, as well as the right of Israel to live within safe and internationally recognized borders. He also said that the use of violence and terrorism in all their forms was absolutely unacceptable and would only worsen the situation, and that the parties should urgently agree on a ceasefire and begin negotiations on a final agreement that until not long ago seemed within reach.

In the course of the same debate, the main parties to the conflict reaffirmed their commitment to the peace process and emphasized the need to put an end to the current state of affairs. In this regard, the Foreign Minister of Israel, Shimon Peres, recognized that the creation of an independent Palestinian State was the best option for Israel. Such a State would enable the Palestinians to exercise their freedoms, prosper economically, maintain their traditions and enjoy the highest level of education. For his part, President Yasser Arafat expressed his commitment to peace as the only guarantee for freedom and security for Israelis, Palestinians and all the peoples of the Middle East.

Likewise, the President of the United States of America, George W. Bush, expressed his commitment to work towards a day when two States — one Israeli, the other Palestinian — live peacefully together, within secure and recognized borders. The announcements made later by Secretary of State Colin Powell in Louisville, Kentucky, were also very constructive and of particular relevance.

These statements demonstrate the existence of a consensus view that the only way to peace, justice and security in the Middle East is through negotiations. Violence will not solve the problems of the region. On the contrary, it will only make them worse.

It is for this reason that we once again call on the parties to observe a ceasefire, in accordance with the Tenet plan, and to move rapidly on implementing the recommendations of the Mitchell report. We must

recall that principle among the recommendations of the report are the efforts that the Palestinian Authority must make to end violence and the need for Israel to halt all settlement activity.

With regard to the acts of violence, the Palestinian Authority must send clear-cut signals to Palestinians and Israelis alike that terrorism and violence are unacceptable and that it will make a 100 per cent effort to prevent these types of acts and to punish the perpetrators.

All activity related to Israeli settlements should be frozen, including the so-called natural growth of the existing ones. In accordance with international law, such settlements are illegal and constitute a violation of the resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council.

The cessation of violence, the resumption of security cooperation and the establishment of confidence-building measures are all essential to the resumption of negotiations. Yet none of these measures will be sustained for long unless the parties return in earnest to the negotiating table and continue with the process that began a decade ago.

To achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East, as is called for in the resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly, progress should be made in all aspects of the peace process.

The question of Palestine should be solved on the basis of the full implementation in good faith of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and the principles of the Madrid Conference, the Oslo accords and other agreements reached by the parties. In the quest for a definitive solution to this conflict every effort should be made to reconcile the legitimate aspirations of Palestinians to their material independence and personal dignity and the legitimate right of Israel to recognition and security.

In the south of Lebanon, the full implementation of Security Council resolution 425 (1978) is essential. We believe that in the current circumstances all parties should exercise utmost restraint and self-control, respect the "blue line" established by the United Nations, and abstain from carrying out or tolerating acts of provocation that can increase the tension along that line.

In respect of the Golan Heights, resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) call for a withdrawal of the Israeli forces from the territories occupied in 1967. In that regard, we are concerned about the lack of dialogue between the Syrian Arab Republic and Israel to implement those resolutions and we call upon both parties to resume the dialogue in a frank and constructive manner, taking into account the principle "land for peace".

One of the dimensions of the United Nations responsibility with respect to the question of Palestine has been the personal commitment of successive Secretaries-General to the peace process. Argentina strongly supports the efforts of Secretary-General Mr. Kofi Annan to persuade the parties to cease violence and to return to the negotiating table. Likewise, my country commends the action taken by the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Terje Roed-Larsen, who has continued to work indefatigably in the same direction. We also support the efforts of the United States, the European Union and other international actors to put back on track the peace process.

The situation in the Middle East is at one of the most difficult and delicate junctures. If the parties do not return to the negotiating table, they will face the prospect of continued fighting in the years to come. We hope that the peoples in the Middle East can live, work and prosper together, because history and geography have destined them to exist side by side. Israeli and Arab political leaders have to act decisively to rekindle in their peoples the commitment to peace. We are conscious that this task will be difficult, but we also know that the path to peace is the only alternative for all inhabitants of the region.

Mr. Abdullah (Brunei Darussalam): Since this is the first time I am taking the floor, I wish to congratulate you, Sir, on your election as President of the General Assembly at this session. I am confident that you will guide us well, and we look forward to working closely with you.

The extremely precarious situation in the Middle East is a cause of deep concern for Brunei Darussalam. With the increasing rate of violence, especially in the Palestinian occupied territories, peace in that region appears more elusive than ever. However, the international community cannot afford to let the efforts and achievements of the past decade wane. We must

instead build on them. The task of restoring and fostering a climate of trust is essential to the resumption of the peace process. Some measures of restraint need to be exercised, and it is important that the conflicting parties end all acts of violence.

In that regard, recent attempts to bring concerned parties to the negotiating table is very much appreciated. We support initiatives undertaken by Senator George Mitchell and welcome the recommendations made in the Mitchell report, released in April this year. We also welcome the recent initiatives of the United States to try to secure a truce between the parties concerned. This initiative will be significant in paving the way for progress by all parties concerned on diplomatic fronts.

At the same time, the United Nations as an institution charged with the maintenance of international peace and security, has a role in this issue that is also crucial. Through its various efforts and activities, the United Nations should continue to assume its responsibility towards all aspects of the question of Palestine until it is resolved in a satisfactory manner.

Brunei Darussalam believes that peace in the Middle East would be possible only with a peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine in accordance with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). The realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and the withdrawal of Israel from Palestinian territory, including the dismantlement of illegal settlements, are essential for any meaningful progress in the peace process.

It is encouraging to note that the international community has unequivocally pronounced its support for the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. In that regard, we welcome the statement made by President Bush in support of the establishment of the Palestinian State.

To conclude, the issue before us no doubt warrants our urgent and utmost attention. We must not stand idly by, watching the dramatic developments pass us by without giving due regard to the tragic loss of lives. The international community must therefore act with determination and do all it can to bring peace to the Middle East.

Mr. Thayeb (Indonesia): Since we convened a year ago to consider the situation in the Middle East, the lack of progress in the peace process continues to claim our collective attention. Regrettably, the peace that we had hoped for, heralded by the Madrid Peace Conference a decade ago, which would have been implemented on two tracks — one between Israel and the Palestinians and the other between Israel and the other Arab countries — lies in a state of relapse.

On the Palestinian track, we are seeing the occupied territories rapidly becoming embroiled in a state of turmoil and turbulence. Since September 2000 hundreds of Palestinians have lost their lives due to the disproportionate use of military force by the occupying Power. Worsening the situation still further is the untenable practice of closures and economic blockades, which have dramatically increased the level of poverty, misery and suffering.

Moreover, the relentless repression manifested by the confiscation of Palestinian lands and the demolition of houses to expand the occupying Power's settlements is definitely not conducive to reviving the peace process. To the contrary, this has exacerbated the already tense atmosphere, fuelling the conflict to almost dangerous proportions, for there have not been in recent years such deeply entrenched feelings of frustration and disillusionment as a result of the policies of occupation.

The Israeli-Syrian peace negotiations are similarly at a standstill, for the basic premise remains the same: that there can be no peace until occupation ceases. The fact that the mandate of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force continues to be renewed is reflective of the tense environment between the two sides. It is therefore pertinent to take not of the observations made in the report of the Secretary-General that,

> "Despite the present quiet in the Israel-Syria sector, the situation in the Middle East continues to be potentially dangerous and is likely to remain so, unless and until a comprehensive settlement covering all aspects of the Middle East problem can be reached." (*S/2001/499, para. 11*)

We are pleased to note that in Lebanon, following the withdrawal of the occupying Power last year, the situation was marked by general stability throughout the area of operation of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon. However, we should remain vigilant in case of sporadic violations of Lebanese airspace, as such incidents have the potential to undermine the

stability of the region. Hence, it is important that all parties respect the Blue Line, as called for by the Security Council, and refrain from taking any action to destabilize the situation. While the Government of Lebanon has taken some limited steps to restore its authority in the formerly occupied areas, we look forward to the day when the sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of the country will be fully restored.

In the Middle East region there is a yearning for peace, a yearning that perhaps far surpasses any known in the past, and the track towards attaining a durable and comprehensive peace is well marked by numerous decisions of the Security Council and the General Assembly, and the successful outcome of the entire peace process depends on their implementation.

In the final analysis, the challenges ahead are immense, but we must ensure that the region does not relapse into strife and struggle. We must seize the opportunity to bring the parties together and render the peace endeavours an irreversible turning point in history. The hopes and interests of the peoples of the Middle East, and indeed of the whole world, call for the achievement of true peace, common security and generalized prosperity.

Mr. Satoh (Japan): I would like to express my appreciation for your leadership, Mr. President, in convening this meeting in a very timely manner to discuss the situation in the Middle East.

The acts of violence that have occurred continuously in this region for more than a year are extremely detrimental to efforts to attain a durable peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians. The Government of Japan calls upon all parties concerned to exercise self-restraint and to put an end to the violence immediately.

The only way to resolve any conflict is through dialogue and negotiation based on the firm determination of the parties concerned to work for peace. We therefore ask both the Israeli and the Palestinian authorities concerned to make the utmost efforts to resume the peace process in accordance with the Tenet plan and the Mitchell report.

In this connection, we welcome Secretary of State Colin Powell's statement, on 19 November, of the firm commitment of the United States Government to actively engage in the Middle East peace process and his prompt dispatch of Assistant Secretary of State Bill Burns and General Anthony Zinni to the region. It is beyond any doubt that the active involvement of the United States is essential for the progress of the peace process. The Government of Japan strongly urges both parties to respond to such efforts of the United States.

Furthermore, the constructive engagement of many other countries interested in the peace and development of the region is necessary in order to move the peace process forward. We welcome the initiatives taken by a number of European countries in this context.

The Government of Japan, for its part, is determined to extend as much support and cooperation as possible to the peace process. Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi and Foreign Minister Makiko Tanaka have repeatedly called on both parties to end the violence, restore mutual confidence and resume the peace process in accordance with the Mitchell report.

It is also an important task of the international community to assist the development and the sustained growth of the Palestinian economy, in parallel with the efforts to seek peace in the Middle East. In recognition of this, since 1993 the Government of Japan has provided economic assistance amounting to more than $600 million for such purposes as helping to cover the necessary cost of establishing the Palestinian Authority, constructing economic and social infrastructure, building schools and hospitals and creating employment. It has also provided emergency assistance amounting to approximately $40 million in order to alleviate the serious economic difficulties of the Palestinians caused by the situation since September of last year.

Moreover, the Government of Japan has been making substantial contributions to the activities of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, as one of its leading donors.

The economic difficulties of Palestinians are becoming increasingly grave. I would therefore like to take this opportunity to stress the importance of further efforts by the international community to support the Palestinian people.

The Government of Japan has consistently supported the right to self-determination for the Palestinian people, including their right to establish an independent State. It has also supported the right of Israel to live in peace within secure and recognized

borders. History has shown that achieving both of these objectives is by no means an easy task. But history has also demonstrated that in the 1990s some concrete steps were achieved towards making both objectives compatible, thanks to the efforts of the countries concerned. The Government of Japan sincerely hopes that the day will soon come when two States, Israel and Palestine, will live together peacefully within secure and recognized borders.

With the terrorist attacks on 11 September as a turning point, there is a new momentum for cooperation in the international community which transcends religious, racial and cultural differences. On the question of peace in the Middle East, too, it is important for the parties concerned to seize this opportunity to redouble their efforts to move forward to a durable peace in the region based on a spirit of harmony and cooperation. The Government of Japan is determined to do its utmost to support such efforts.

Mr. Maquieira (Chile) (*spoke in Spanish*): As in previous years, my delegation wishes to reiterate that Chile's position on the situation in the Middle East is one of strict respect for the principles of international law.

Chile wishes to reiterate what was stated in the declaration on the crisis in the Middle East that the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the Rio Group issued at their meeting of 14 November, on the occasion of the fifty-sixth session of the General Assembly. Chile also reaffirms its support for Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), which created the legal framework for a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the conflict that is the subject of our debate.

Accordingly, we recognize the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to form an independent, viable and democratic State, as well as Israel's right to exist within secure and internationally recognized borders.

We note with concern, and we regret, that the peace process negotiations begun in Oslo in 1993 have been suspended, giving way to a spiral of violence, retaliation and the excessive use of force, which are an offence to the principles of all civilizations and constitute an ongoing violation of the human rights of innocent civilians in both countries. As the Security Council President, Ambassador Durrant of Jamaica, said so well yesterday, it would be irresponsible and absolutely unacceptable to allow this situation to continue.

My Government considers this situation to be all the more serious, given the dark shadow the current terrorist threat casts on world peace. We therefore welcome the mediation efforts of the United States, the Russian Federation, the European Union, the United Nations Special Coordinator and other international actors, who have proposed new initiatives aimed at creating an environment conducive to dialogue between the parties.

In this regard, we wish to make a clear and explicit appeal to the parties to the conflict to cease immediately all acts of violence and to return as soon as possible to the peace process negotiations, which the international community has proposed for that purpose, especially through the implementation in good faith of the measures and timetables contained in the Mitchell plan. We hope that the negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians will proceed without interruption; that the parties will abandon rigid positions that do not contribute to placing dialogue above violence; and that they will not take unilateral measures that might affect progress in the dialogue or prejudge the final outcome of the talks.

We hope that the Syrian Arab Republic and Israel will soon resume their talks on the Golan Heights, in fulfilment of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

Chile maintains excellent relations with the State of Israel, the neighbouring Arab countries and the Palestinian National Authority. All the peoples that came to our country grew and developed, as did their descendants, thus helping Chile to grow and develop as well. It is therefore understandable that our people and our Government fervently look forward to an end to the conflict in a land that is three times holy and aspires to seeing an era of peace take root in the region so that the deep wounds that scar the land can heal and be forgotten.

Mr. Yahaya (Malaysia): Without exception, this year, as in previous years, scores of resolutions and decisions of the General Assembly have reiterated the need for a comprehensive peace in the Middle East that would include a just and final settlement of the Palestinian question. Regrettably, such peace remains as elusive as ever, even when many conflict situations in other parts of the world have long been resolved.

instead of peace, we continue to witness unmitigated violence in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem.

The situation in the Middle East continues to be a matter of grave concern to the international community. We note that the Secretary-General, in paragraph 5 of his report contained in document A/56/642, has observed that

> "the present Israeli-Palestinian crisis has entered its second year with an escalation of violence, while the peace process remains stalled despite many international efforts to revive it".

My delegation has time and again stressed that it is imperative, if enduring peace is to be achieved in the Middle East, for the peace process to be revived on an urgent basis. As the Secretary-General aptly stated, "In fact, we are dealing with the worst crisis in the Middle East since the 1993 Oslo Agreement."(*ibid.*)

We must rekindle faith in a peaceful solution of the conflict and douse any prospects of a return to a full-fledged war.

The international community should move to condemn the general policy of oppression and suppression carried out by the occupying Power over the Arab population in the occupied Arab territories, including Jerusalem, beyond condemning the ongoing assault on Palestinian civilians, as manifested by the ongoing confiscation of lands, demolition of Arab-owned houses and relentless expansion of illegal Jewish settlements in the occupied Arab territories. Clearly, the continuation of these policies is not conducive to reviving the peace process. On the contrary, they contribute to exacerbating the current tense situation, thereby fuelling the conflict. We fail to appreciate the logic of these provocative and inhumane policies and practices, unless they are deliberately intended to prolong the conflict, for reasons best known to the State of Israel.

The continued occupation of the Syrian Golan by Israel constitutes a serious impediment to achieving a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the region. It is also regrettable that there has been no progress in the peace talks between Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic that have been suspended since 1996. My delegation is deeply concerned that the inhabitants of the Syrian Golan continue to live under Israeli occupation, with all the deprivation, humiliation and other indignities that life under occupation entails. The continued existence and expansion of Jewish settlements in the occupied Syrian Golan remains a major stumbling block to a resumption of the Syrian-Israeli peace process, and this again calls into question Israel's seriousness about seeking peace.

We call on Israel to resume peace negotiations on the principle of land for peace, which is the only thing that will guarantee its long-term peace and security in the region. Malaysia reiterates its call for the withdrawal of all occupation forces to the line of 4 June 1967 as an indispensable element in any peace settlement for the region. We look forward to the early return of the Syrian Golan as an integral part of a comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Mr. Balzan (Malta), Vice-President, took the Chair

On the issue of Lebanon, my delegation is seriously concerned about the serious air, sea and land violations of the withdrawal line — the Blue Line. We urge Israel to put an end to these breaches and also to respect the safety of the personnel of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). These violations have the potential to ignite an explosive situation in what is essentially a still stable region.

My delegation takes this opportunity to congratulate Mr. Terje Roed-Larsen, United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, who is also the Secretary-General's Personal Representative to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority, and Mr. Staffan de Mistura, the Personal Representative of the Secretary-General to southern Lebanon. We condemn them for their tireless efforts in coordinating United Nations and international assistance to the Palestinian people and Lebanon, respectively. We also wish to commend the men and women who are serving, and have served, with the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force and UNIFIL for their courage and dedication in a difficult and often dangerous environment, risking life and limb in the cause of international peace and security.

It is now universally acknowledged that a just, comprehensive and lasting solution of the Arab-Israeli conflict is possible only through a negotiated political settlement. This must include Israel's complete withdrawal from all Arab and Palestinian land occupied since 1967, including Jerusalem and the

occupied Syrian Golan, the establishment of an independent and sovereign State of Palestine, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, and the recognition of the principle of the right of return for Arabs who have been displaced during the decades of conflict. If comprehensive and lasting peace remains the goal of the current Government in Israel, it cannot continue to deny the rights of the Palestinians and, equally, other Arabs living in the occupied Syrian Golan.

Mr. Kpotsra (Togo) (*spoke in French*): This year, the General Assembly is once again taking up the situation in the Middle East in a context that gives little reason for optimism. Not only have the many efforts made by the international community, in particular since the Oslo conference, with a view to a just, final and comprehensive settlement of the Israeli-Arab conflict, fallen far short of making it possible to reach the desired results, but, even worse, the growing deterioration of the situation on the ground for the last 14 months has also significantly blocked the peace process that was about to yield results.

The result of this worsening of violence and repression is, unfortunately, well known. It simply defies understanding. Faced with such a situation, we can only express our regret that the appeal launched on 7 October by the Security Council in resolution 1322 (2000) was not heeded. It was an appeal that hostilities be immediately brought to a halt and that all necessary measures be taken to put an end to the infernal cycle of violence. It is just as deplorable that the provisions of the accord signed at Sharm el-sheik in October 2000, as well as the recommendations submitted by the Fact-Finding Committee established under that accord, have not yet been implemented.

My delegation believes that the path leading to the restoration of confidence and the resumption of the peace process requires, on the part of the Israeli Government, just as on the part of the Palestinian Authority, a prompt and rigorous execution of the commitments to which they subscribed at Sharm el-Sheikh in October 2000 and at Taba in January 2001.

To that end, it is imperative that they urgently take all necessary and concrete measures to end the present confrontation, maintain calm and prevent the outbreak of new acts of violence. Everything must be done to bring about a return to the situation that prevailed before the present crisis, in particular by restoring law and order; strengthening cooperation in security matters; and putting an end to the economic blockade of the occupied Palestinian territories.

Furthermore, each party must endeavour to discourage, identify and condemn all acts that incite violence, as these can only perpetuate the cycle of violence and give rise to additional resentment. From that standpoint, the proposals contained in the Tenet plan regarding the ceasefire seem to offer a positive solution and should be implemented without further delay. It also seems essential for the Israeli Government to proceed to a systematic moratorium on any settlement activities.

In this way a climate could be established that would be conducive to the resumption of negotiations. These should take place on the basis of the accords and arrangements concluded before 28 September 2000, so that the momentum for peace that emerged from the Madrid Conference and the Oslo accords can be sustained.

In considering the situation in the Middle East, one cannot overemphasize the ongoing responsibility of the international community with respect to the achievement of a satisfactory settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict based on internationally binding resolutions. That is why my delegation congratulates the Secretary-General once again on the effective and determined action he is tirelessly undertaking in seeking a solution to the crisis.

The very decisive role played by the sponsors of the Middle East peace process must be noted. In that regard, as emphasized by the head of the Togolese delegation during the general debate, Togo is pleased at the recent positive developments with respect to prospects for the establishment of a Palestinian State that would coexist with Israel within internationally recognized borders.

However, the hopes generated by advances in the international situation and by the positive initiatives currently under way cannot obscure the fact that the Security Council has not fulfilled its primary role under the Charter as the body responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine, and a fortiori to understand, how the Security Council, during this critical period, could have been unable to take the measures expected of it to prevent the situation in the region from deteriorating following the events of September 2000. Its ineffectiveness was made evident

to all when, on 27 March 2001, it was unable to adopt the draft resolution before it — submitted on the initiative of those of its members belonging to the Non-Aligned Movement — on the dispatch of an observation mission to the occupied Palestinian territories. There is no doubt that the deployment of that mission would have had a deterrent effect on the escalation of terrorism and on the continuation of acts of violence and would have helped gradually to restore confidence, leading to the implementation of the recommendations of the Mitchell report.

Today we express our deep hope that the Israeli Government and the Palestinian Authority will decide once and for all to demonstrate the necessary political will to bring about an end to the cycle of violence, a restoration of the climate of confidence and a resumption of the peace process. This is a prerequisite if we wish the efforts of the international community to supplement in a useful way those that the parties themselves are called upon to undertake with a view to bringing about peace in the Middle East — a peace whose primary requirements are a just, comprehensive and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine, the restoration of the Golan to Syria and a total end to the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon.

Mr. Buallay (Bahrain) (*spoke in Arabic*): The question of Palestine is at the core of the dispute in the Middle East. Current developments in the Palestinian territories pose a threat to security, stability and vital interests in the region and beyond. The international community, and in particular the co-sponsors of the peace process, are therefore in duty bound to shoulder their responsibility to provide protection for the Palestinian people. These include the dispatch of international forces to ensure security and to put the peace process back on track towards its objectives, through the full implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978), as well as other relevant international resolutions calling on Israel fully to withdraw from the Arab territories occupied in the Syrian Arab Golan to the borders of 4 June 1967, as well as the remaining Lebanese territory under occupation, and full recognition of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, including their right to return and to establish an independent State, with Jerusalem as its capital.

In this regard, the State of Bahrain, through a telephone conversation between His Highness the Emir of Bahrain and President George W. Bush of the United States of America, expressed its appreciation for the statements made by President Bush supporting the establishment of a Palestinian State on the basis of internationally binding resolutions.

The State of Bahrain stresses that this stance on the part of the United States of America has had a positive impact on the security and stability of the Middle East and on the peace process. The State of Bahrain appreciates the decision by the United States of America to seek a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

Shaikh Mohammed Bin Mubarak Al-Khalifa, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the State of Bahrain, in his statement before the General Assembly on Tuesday, 13 November 2001, also welcomed the statement made by President Bush regarding the right of the Palestinian people to establish their own State. That right is supported by the majority of the States of the world and is finding increased support from the international community.

We welcome also the statement made by the Secretary of State of the United States, Colin Powell, in Louisville, Kentucky, when he spoke of two States — Palestinian and Israeli — in addition to discussing the Israeli occupation of areas under the control of the Palestinian Authority. However, the most important matter he raised pertained to the fact that the United States Government was prepared to initiate diplomatic efforts to restart peace talks aimed at a settlement by appointing General Zinni and Mr. Burns as members of the working group created for that purpose.

The important thing now is to find a mechanism for implementation, because this troubled region is in dire need of a final settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The Middle East region is the birthplace of human civilizations and divine religions. Unfortunately, Arabs and Muslims from the region are now the target of deliberate defamation campaigns carried out by certain parties whose objectives are suspect and who try to link Islam with terrorism. This is neither just nor equitable. Indeed, it is unjust, because the behaviour of certain individuals is being generalized to defame a whole remarkable culture and religion — namely the Arab-Islamic civilization that calls for cultural and civilizational interaction and dialogue.

Many thinkers and leaders in the West have made positive statements with regard to Islam and the Islamic culture, disassociating that culture from international terrorism, which does not represent any civilization, religion or nation. Wise voices have also warned against expressions of enmity towards the Arab-Islamic civilization, one of the largest civilizations in the history of the world, which will only grow stronger and more influential as the campaign against Arabs and Muslims continues to rage.

Mr. Tadmoury (Lebanon) (*spoke in Arabic*): At a time when foreign occupation has subsided in most areas of the world, the General Assembly is once again resuming its discussion of the situation in the Middle East: the occupation by Israel of Arab territories in Palestine and Syria, in addition to the Lebanese Shebaa farmlands. Although the terrorist attacks on the United States of America in September, and the effect they have had on the global situation, still cast a heavy shadow over our work, those tragic events cannot conceal from the attention of the international community and the media the violence that is taking place in the occupied Palestinian territory. This violence is the result of the extreme aggression by Israel aimed at denying the Palestinian people their political, humanitarian and economic rights and their right to statehood, and to obliterate their national identity.

As all Members know, the essence of the struggle in the Middle East is the question of Palestine, which has been a central concern of the United Nations ever since its inception. It is regrettable that Israel has provided no evidence that its future policy will be aimed at achieving a just and comprehensive solution to the question of the Middle East.

Various influential international parties have responded to the situation, most recently, Mr. Colin Powell, the United States Secretary of State, whose vision includes some positive aspects of great significance.

Lebanon is still suffering from Israeli aggression — the daily violation of its sovereignty, airspace, territory and territorial waters, including the flagrant use of force deep inside Lebanon. The Israeli air force engages in threatening acts on a daily basis in the skies above Lebanon, spreading terror among civilians, especially schoolchildren. Israeli war vessels constantly enter Lebanese territorial waters and commit acts of provocation against fishing boats. This was referred to in the report of the Secretary-General of June last, in which the Israeli violations were described as provocations.

In this context, we should recall that the Israeli withdrawal that began in May 2000 has not yet been completed. Security Council resolution 425 (1978) called for full Israeli withdrawal from Lebanese territory. It is well-known that complete withdrawal should include withdrawal from Lebanese airspace and territorial waters and from the Shebaa farmlands. Syria has recognized the Lebanese identity of that land, as recorded in official documents and reports of the General Assembly and the Security Council; no other party or State has a claim to the Shebaa farmlands.

Israel still retains 31 Lebanese people as hostages in its prisons, some of whom have been there for 25 years without trial, in flagrant violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 and its relevant Protocols. Israel left about 130,000 landmines in the liberated territory of Lebanon, as a result of which dozens of people have been killed and more than 100 people are permanently disabled. The Israeli authorities are still denying us copies of more than 60 per cent of the maps that show where the mines are located. The Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon and western Bekaa, which lasted for over 22 years, has led to great loss and damage, affecting infrastructure, housing, farms, schools, power stations and bridges, has caused death and injury to thousands and has retarded development and growth. Appropriate reparations to Lebanon for such actions is required under international humanitarian law. Lebanon will spare no effort to appeal to specialized international, judicial and political organs in seeking redress.

I reaffirm once again that Lebanon is determined to preserve its internationally recognized borders, which were demarcated in 1923 and reaffirmed under the Lebanese-Israeli truce of 1949, making it clear that the so-called blue line, to which Israel withdrew, did not constitute the international border. We have three reservations with regard to that issue, which are included in the Secretary-General's report of 16 June 2000.

Lebanon is determined to preserve its right of sovereignty over the Shebaa farmlands and its authority and sovereignty over the sites delineated by the United

Nations Disengagement Observer Force on Mount Hermon.

Ten years ago, the entire world looked to Madrid, where a peace conference was held, with the participation of all the parties to the conflict, under the sponsorship of Russia and the United States. We hoped for a just and comprehensive settlement. Both parties, Arab and Israeli, achieved promising progress on all tracks. Then, all of a sudden, Israel decided to give priority to the use of force instead of the principles of justice and right based on international law. In September 2000, Israel, represented by Ariel Sharon, now the Prime Minister, took the provocative step of violating the Al-Aqsa mosque, an action that began the cycle of violence.

Now we are witnessing human massacres and methodical destruction of cities, towns and farms. It is regrettable that the international community, especially the Security Council, is unable to shoulder its responsibilities to preserve international peace and security by taking the necessary measures to stop the grave deterioration in the region.

The requirements for peace in the Middle East are well known. They are based on a completion of the Israeli withdrawal from the rest of occupied Lebanese territory, namely Shebaa farms, and the recognition of the rights of the Palestinian people to establish their own independent State with Jerusalem as its capital and to exercise the right of return, in conformity with General Assembly resolution 194 (III), and the right of self-determination and to life within secure borders, in addition to Israel's full withdrawal from the Syrian Golan to the lines of 4 June 1967, based on resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978), the Madrid framework of reference and its principle of land for peace, and halting all provocative practices in occupied Palestine, occupied Golan and Lebanon.

Lebanon is committed to the peace process, which has been rendered void of substance by Israel. We see no future in the Israeli Government's policy of carrying out unjust security measures and State terrorism at the expense of the requirements for a just and comprehensive peace.

Lebanon, which is a democratic Arab country open to the world, has a civilization that dates back 5,000 years. We have been living in harmony, coexistence and dialogue because of our unique social and cultural fabric. We call on the Assembly to rally the forces of justice and peace to put an end to the historic injustice being inflicted on the Palestinian people and a definitive end to one of the most dangerous and complex regional conflicts in the Middle East, which is exhausting the riches of our peoples and hindering their progress and contribution to the world. This would allow us to participate in a global partnership under the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

Mr. Daoth (Australia): For Australia, events in the Middle East over the past year have intensified the sense of deep frustration we felt when violence broke out again towards the end of last year.

After the real and courageous progress that Israel and the Palestinians made in the first half of 2000, we watched with dismay and disappointment the provocation, violence and retaliation. Australia has repeatedly called at the highest levels for an immediate end to the violence and an early and effective resumption of negotiations. This is now more important than ever.

Australia remains committed to a negotiated settlement based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and the principle of land for peace. We remain strongly committed to the territorial integrity of Israel and the right of the people of Israel to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries free from threats or acts of force, as affirmed in resolution 242 (1967). We are equally committed to the application of this principle to all States in the region.

Australia has consistently recognized the proper and legitimate right and aspiration of the Palestinian people to self-determination. We expect that a comprehensive, just and durable resolution of the region's conflict necessarily will include the establishment of a viable State for the Palestinian people, in accordance with the principles of resolution 242 (1967). The sooner that this can be achieved along agreed boundaries, the better. To that end, we continue to regard settlement activity in the territories occupied during the 1967 war as contrary to international law, provocative and deeply harmful to the peace process.

Australia will continue to play a positive and constructive role in support of peace in the region. We have maintained an active programme of development assistance to the Palestinian people for many years. This has included support for programmes to develop

democracy and good governance. Our programme of assistance will continue, with planned expenditure this year of around $9 million.

Almost half of this assistance will be allocated to the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which remains the primary agency for the delivery of international assistance in the region to Palestinian refugees. We continue to value highly the work of UNRWA.

Australia will also continue its programme of bilateral assistance to the Palestinian Authority. This year, we have allocated more than $2 million for this purpose. We will also be continuing our support for the work of non-governmental organizations, including the World Food Programme (WFP) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), with around $3 million being earmarked for the Palestinian programmes of WFP and ICRC. In addition to our development assistance to the Palestinian people, this year Australia will provide almost $1 million through the WFP development pledge for Syria.

The Middle East is a region where the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their delivery vehicles remains a major concern for the international community. Non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction is, moreover, a key component of the broader vision of peace in the Middle East. We strongly urge all States in the Middle East that have not already done so to become parties to all relevant international arms control and non-proliferation instruments. We urge those that are parties to those instruments to adhere to both their spirit and their letter.

The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) continues to provide a solid foundation for efforts to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and work towards their elimination. Australia has consistently called upon the four countries — Cuba, India, Israel and Pakistan — which are not yet members of the NPT to join the Treaty as soon as possible. We do not consider that special security concerns should be a bar to NPT membership for any country.

Another critically important element of the nuclear non-proliferation regime is the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT). Many Middle Eastern States have signed the CTBT, and Jordan, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates have ratified it. We take this opportunity to call upon all regional States yet to sign or ratify the CTBT to do so without delay, in particular those States whose ratification is a prerequisite for the Treaty's entry into force.

Middle Eastern members of the Conference on Disarmament have clear interests in pressing for early commencement of negotiations on a treaty ending the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons — a fissile material cut-off treaty. Conclusion of a cut-off treaty would be a further step to reduce tensions in the Middle East and is the logical next step on the nuclear arms control and disarmament agenda.

Australia urges those Middle Eastern States that have not yet done so to contribute to efforts to strengthen the global regime against anti-personnel landmines by ratifying the Ottawa Convention banning landmines. In addition, we call on all States to accede to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons and its Protocols, which, together, are an important instrument of international humanitarian law. We also encourage Middle Eastern States to join in efforts to prevent the destabilizing proliferation of long-range ballistic missiles, including through support for the international code of conduct on ballistic missile proliferation, to be launched late next year.

As the recent spate of anthrax cases shows clearly, the threat of chemical and biological weapons is immediate, real and indiscriminate. Australia urges all States to redouble their efforts to halt the spread and use of these heinous weapons. It is imperative that all States which have not yet done so sign and ratify both the Chemical and Biological Weapons Conventions. It is incumbent on all parties to ensure that these treaties work effectively and efficiently in the face of developing threats.

In every region, a positive security environment depends on States meeting their international obligations. We share the concern of others that the weapons verification and monitoring work in Iraq, mandated by the Security Council, has not been possible for nearly three years. The continued lack of assurance about weapons of mass destruction in Iraq can only have a destabilizing effect on the region as a whole. We call upon Iraq to cooperate fully with the United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission to achieve full implementation of all relevant Security Council resolutions.

We also urge all Middle Eastern States to take effective legal measures to combat the threat to international peace and security posed by terrorism, in accordance with recent Security Council resolutions. These include becoming parties as soon as possible to the relevant international conventions and protocols relating to terrorism, denying safe haven to terrorists and those who support them and implementing appropriate national measures to prevent the financing of terrorism. Australia places great importance on early finalization of the draft comprehensive convention against terrorism. We urge Middle Eastern States to play a constructive and flexible role in efforts to seek compromise so that remaining differences in the text can be resolved.

Australia has been disappointed this past year at the lack of progress on the issues that so tragically divide the Israeli and Palestinian peoples and hold them back from the enjoyment and benefits of a full and free life. Nevertheless, we have been encouraged by the commitment and perseverance of the major players.

Although the present situation is difficult, we have a viable set of principles to guide us back to the path of a negotiated peace. The recommendations of the Mitchell report and of the Tenet plan are the vital and necessary steps to end the current violence. All parties should seek immediately to implement them in good faith. Only then can mutual confidence be rebuilt. This is necessary to enable them to address their historic grievances on the basis of security, individual dignity and mutual respect.

Compromise by all parties will be essential. We have seen that compromise is possible, even on the most deeply felt issues. Courage, leadership and flexibility will be required. These qualities have been displayed before and Australia now calls on the leaders of the region to show that they have these qualities in sufficient store to achieve the goal of a just, comprehensive and lasting peace for the region. Only then will they secure for their people that greatest of prizes, for now and for future generations: a bright, prosperous and safe future.

Mr. Sagach (Ukraine): For more than half a century, the situation in the Middle East has remained a subject of the close attention and deep concern of the United Nations and the international community at large. Continuous efforts to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East have, at different periods, faced progress and setbacks, victories and failures.

The undeniable truth learned by all of us is that peace in the Middle East, as well as in any other conflict region, cannot be achieved by force. It can be reached only through dialogue. The most complicated and controversial negotiations can do much more than any act of violence, which inevitably results in the loss of human lives, destruction and despair. The experiences of Egypt and Jordan have clearly proved that peace agreements can be reached between the Israelis and the Arabs.

Ukraine has always been supportive of the Middle East peace process. We are convinced that there is no alternative for both Arabs and Israelis than to overcome violence, hostility and mistrust, to stop mutual accusations and, finally, to resume the negotiation process. There is no doubt that only lasting peace can provide security in all its political, economic and social aspects, long awaited by the peoples of the region. In order to achieve a viable solution, this process should be based on the relevant Security Council resolutions, in particular resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), the principle of land for peace, as well as other principles laid down at the Madrid Conference and in the Oslo agreements.

Today, as never before, there is an urgent need to achieve progress in the peace process on the Israeli-Palestinian track, which is the core of the conflict in the Middle East. Just last year, peace between Israelis and Palestinians seemed to be within reach. Regrettably, 14 months of violence have not only claimed the lives of hundreds of people, but have also pushed the parties farther apart than they have ever been over the past decade.

The basic elements of the position of Ukraine on the Palestinian issue were presented to the General Assembly earlier today. I would like to reiterate just a few important points. The recommendations of the Mitchell report and the Tenet work plan constitute a solid basis for finding a way out of the ongoing crisis in the Middle East. The full and immediate implementation by the parties of the steps envisaged therein will lead the way towards bringing the violence to an end, restoring mutual trust and confidence and creating the necessary conditions for the resumption of the Israeli-Palestinian negotiation process. Peace in the

Middle East can be achieved only through negotiations aimed both at the establishment of a viable Palestinian State and at ensuring the right of the State of Israel to live within secure and internationally recognized borders.

The achievement of a comprehensive Middle East settlement is impossible without finding acceptable solutions to all its integral parts, in particular on the Israeli-Lebanese and Israeli-Syrian tracks. In this regard, we welcome the fact that, over the past year, the situation in the area of operation of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) in South Lebanon has been marked mostly by general stability and gradual restoration to normalcy. Israel, pursuant to Security Council resolution 425 (1978), has withdrawn from the southern part of the country.

My country remains concerned, however, by serious breaches of the Blue Line, especially in the Shebaa farms area, in direct violation of Security Council decisions, and by the exchanges of fire across the Blue Line. As a troop-contributing country to UNIFIL, we have been particularly alarmed by actions that put the security of UNIFIL at risk. Such acts are totally unacceptable and should be prevented from happening again.

We encourage the Lebanese and Israeli parties to enter into a dialogue on all issues that remain outstanding following the implementation of Security Council resolution 425 (1978) and the establishment of the Blue Line. We also call on the parties concerned to exercise utmost restraint and to refrain from any acts of violence or provocation against each other, while ensuring full respect of the Blue Line, as identified by the United Nations. We believe that the full restoration of the effective authority of the Lebanese Government in South Lebanon will undoubtedly contribute to further progress in UNIFIL's discharging of its mandate and in ensuring its safety.

The process of reconfiguring and redeploying UNIFIL has unfolded smoothly so far. However, my country believes that the further implementation of the Secretary-General's reconfiguration plan should be directly linked to developments in the situation on the ground and in the region as a whole, as well as to the security situation in respect of UNIFIL.

Ukraine has contributed an engineering battalion to UNIFIL, which performs demining in South Lebanon and is thereby helping to return that area to normal life. My country stands ready to expand its contribution to these efforts by participating in humanitarian demining and by engaging its industrial and technological potential in the reconstruction of that country.

We regret that there has not been substantial progress on the Israeli-Syrian track over the past year. It is in the interests of all the peoples of the region to have the Israeli-Syrian talks on the occupied Syrian Golan resume without further delay or preconditions. In this regard, we call on the Governments of Israel and Syria to again re-engage in direct talks. We hope that the election of Syria this year as a non-permanent member of the Security Council will facilitate progress in the Israeli-Syrian dialogue, which is so desperately needed if there is to be any hope of improving the situation in the Middle East.

In conclusion, I would like to state once again that the priorities of Ukraine's foreign policy in the region are developing friendly and mutually beneficial relations with all nations in the Middle East, as well as facilitating the peace process there. The appointment last September by the President of Ukraine of a plenipotentiary envoy for the Middle East reaffirms Ukraine's determination to contribute further to the achievement of comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item for this afternoon. We shall continue to hear the remaining speakers in the debate on this item on Monday, 3 December, at 10 a.m.

A number of representatives have requested to exercise the right of reply. May I remind Members that statements in the exercise of the right of reply are limited to 10 minutes for the first intervention and to 5 minutes for the second intervention, and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Hamzehei (Islamic Republic of Iran): It is quite natural these days for the representative of the Zionist regime to make incoherent outbursts. Their savage treatment of the Palestinians, and especially of Palestinian children, has outraged the world and brought about condemnation of the Zionist regime. The unsubstantiated assertions made by the Zionist representative today, including those regarding the bombing incident in Buenos Aires, were meant to divert attention from the brutality and violations perpetrated against the Palestinian people in total

disregard of the Fourth Geneva Convention. As to the perennial question of whether those fighting occupation are terrorists or freedom fighters — and the lines are clearly defined in that respect — forces of occupation and those with greater military capabilities have traditionally considered those under their tyranny who did not wilfully submit to their injustice to be terrorists.

It is astonishing that a regime with a dark record of developing, producing and stockpiling many inhumane kinds of weapons of mass destruction ventures to accuse a country that is among those in the Middle East that have acceded to the most basic international instruments in effect in the field of disarmament. Iran is a full party to instruments that are among the main pillars of international disarmament, such as the 1925 Geneva Protocol, the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), the Biological Weapons Convention and the Chemical Weapons Convention. Despite numerous appeals from the international community, Israel has consistently refused to join those instruments, and is continuing its clandestine programme to develop and produce several kinds of weapons of mass destruction. Israel now remains the only non-party to the NPT in the Middle East. At the same time, its nuclear programme and its unsafeguarded facilities continue, alarmingly, to threaten regional and global peace and security.

The regime does not enjoy a better record in other fields of disarmament, particularly in the biological and chemical areas. There are numerous reports of Israel's clandestine chemical and biological programme. Israel's refusal to join the relevant treaties is another corroborating indication of the existence of such programmes that heightens the deep concerns of the international community about its programmes to develop weapons of mass destruction and its arsenals.

Mr. Mekdad (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): The delegation of the Syrian Arab Republic would like to exercise its right of reply to respond to the shameless attempts to spread misconceptions made by the representative of Israel in the General Assembly this afternoon.

Let me stress at the very outset that the representative of Israel said everything but the truth in his statement. Israel and its representatives seem to believe that the use of such words as peace, security and terrorism and the shedding of crocodile tears before the international community can divert attention from the main cause for the tense situation in the Middle East. That cause is first, and last, Israel's occupation of Arab lands in Palestine, Syria and Lebanon.

If any representative in this Hall were to look into the rather tedious tirade we have just heard from the Israeli delegation, he would not find a single word about Israel's occupation of Arab land. Israel is the last country to have the right to speak about terrorism. Israel is the first and sole school of terrorism in the region. Many excellent pupils have graduated from that school. Let us recall that some of its graduates are known killers wanted by international tribunals. I believe everyone here knows whom I mean. They were responsible for Deir Yassin, Kibbiya, Sabra, Shatila, Qana and, just a few days ago, Beit Rima.

In the last 12 months alone, Israel has succeeded in killing over 800 Palestinians. The latest of those victims were five Palestinian children on their way to school on a rather lovely morning in the beautiful land of Palestine. And now the representative of Israel has come to speak to us about terrorism. Shame! What a farce! What about Israel's siege of Beirut for over 80 days? And the representative of Israel still speaks of terrorism. Israel is a master at, and excellent practitioner of, terrorism.

Thirty-three years ago, Israel uprooted half a million Syrians from their towns and villages in the Golan. Israel is now building settlements atop the ruined homes of those uprooted people. What peace does Israel talk about? What resolutions is Israel talking about? If Israel is truly desirous of achieving peace, why has it not yet implemented United Nations resolutions? What has prevented it from doing so?

Since 1948, Syria has hosted many Palestinian refugees; actually the figure is half a million. Syria has tried to compensate those refugees for all the depravations visited upon them by Israel. At least they have the means for a dignified life. It is not strange for Israel to accuse these refugees and their organizations of terrorism, as for Israel the only good Palestinian is a dead Palestinian. Israel does not want those people back. When those Palestinians call for return, they are hunted down and killed in neighbouring Arab countries. Many capitals of many Member States of the United Nations have witnessed massacres of Palestinians by Israel. These acts are well known.

Furthermore, my delegation wishes to stress again that the headquarters of the organizations mentioned by the representative of Israel in his statement are in Palestine. He knows that full well. It was Israel that allowed at least some of those organizations to return. As for the offices in Syria, they are information offices that practise no other activities. Syria will stand shoulder to shoulder with Lebanon and its people until they regain all their land under Israeli occupation.

Syria paved the way to peace. Israeli conditions and insistence on occupation were the factors that ended negotiations. In other words, in practice, Israel ended negotiations. If it refuses to withdraw, why negotiate? What are we negotiating on? Despite all these difficulties, Syria has said at the highest levels that it has no preconditions for peace except the achievement of a just and comprehensive peace. This is rejected by Israel. Israel wants peace, security and land. Israel makes a grave mistake if it believes that those three objectives can be reconciled.

Mr. Tadmoury (Lebanon) (*spoke in Arabic*): A careful examination of the statement by the representative of Israel makes us realize that the objective is to incite some parties against a small country like Lebanon and to exploit a difficult international situation condemned by Lebanon and the entire international community at a time when Lebanon is trying to revive its economy and resume a life that has just begun to return to normal.

As others have done, I wish to ask why there was resistance in Lebanon. Why did Lebanon resist for more than 22 years? Why was the infrastructure destroyed in Lebanon? Why did the economy suffer so greatly? Why did Lebanon resist? Was the primary reason not the Israeli occupation and the Israeli insistence on destroying Lebanon?

Why is there an intifada now in the occupied Palestinian territories? Is the reason not the Israeli occupation? Is the reason not the denial of agreements by Israel? Is it not Israel's disregard for international legitimacy and the principles of international law?

Israel considers that it has completed its withdrawal from Lebanon. What are the air, sea and land incursions perpetrated daily by Israel? Are they not a form of occupation? Comprehensive withdrawal means a cessation of these breaches by air, sea and land. We are adamant on the issue of the Shebaa farmlands. They are ours. That was recognized was Syria. Indeed, the Secretary-General in his report of May 2000 said that the United Nations has demarcated the line of withdrawal. This is a virtual line that cannot in any way jeapordize Lebanon's rights.

In one of the paragraphs of his statement, the representative of Israel took Lebanon to task for invoking international legitimacy. He said that we hide behind it and exploit it. Let me ask Israel why it does not invoke international legitimacy and why it does not implement Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 425 (1978) and General Assembly resolution 194 (III), which are first and foremost international legitimacy. Lebanon is a small country. All we have is our ability to invoke international legitimacy. We shall continue to invoke international legitimacy until our rights are fulfilled and until just and comprehensive peace is established in Lebanon and in the entire region.

Mr. Jacob (Israel): The debate on this agenda item has largely amounted to a steady stream of allegations levelled against Israel by representatives of regimes that are themselves widely recognized as guilty of atrocities far worse than those of which Israel stands accused.

Incredibly, the representative of Syria would like us to believe that Israel is the source of terror in the Middle East and that Syria is, in fact, a leading force against terror. That Syria should attempt to divert attention from its well-known record of support for terrorism is not altogether surprising. Syria harbours, supports and encourages some of the most vicious terrorist organizations in the world, many of which have chosen for these reasons to make their home quite comfortably in Damascus. Syria has even employed terrorist tactics against its own citizens, as it did in the hideous terrorist massacre committed by the Syrian regime in the city of Hama in 1982, in which 30,000 civilians were butchered and the city was replaced with a parking lot.

As for Lebanon, whose territory continues to serve as a base for terrorist operations against Israel, its consistent refusal to prevent its territory from being used as a springboard for terrorist attacks against my country is the primary source of instability along the Blue Line. The Secretary-General has repeatedly drawn attention to this fact. Any attempt to accuse Israel of cross-border aggression is a thinly veiled attempt to

divert attention from Lebanon's consistent failure to comply with the will of the international community.

With regard to the statement by the representative of Iran, we have yet another example of a State widely recognized as one of the world's leading sponsors of terrorism seeking to shift attention to so-called Israeli aggression. Iran is a primary supporter of terrorist operations of the Hezbollah and has had a hand in countless terrorist operations against Israelis and other nationals over the years.

I am confident that for most delegates, the question of who is a terrorist is not a difficult one to answer. Perhaps, when the day comes when these regimes who have spoken here today can look at themselves in the mirror and see their true character, we will be able to overcome the major threat to peace and security in the new millennium and move forward to a future of peace and coexistence for the benefit of all peoples of the region.

The Acting President: Before giving the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to exercise his right to a second intervention, may I remind delegates that second interventions are limited to five minutes and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Mekdad (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): As a matter of fact, the latest statement by the representative of Israel deserves no reply. As usual, it is replete with lies, exaggerations and distortion of facts. I had wished that he had said one word on the roots of the dispute in the Middle East and the reason for all these developments.

The reason, as I have recently stated, is Israeli occupation. I should like to stress in this regard that our people, brought up to cherish our dignity and our place in the world, will not give an inch in our demand for our legitimate rights — the liberation of our land from Israeli occupation.

As for talk of terrorism and its meaning, Israel's victims are to be found everywhere in the world. Tens of thousands of Palestinians have been scattered in many parts of the world for many years.

According to United Nations reports, Israel has violated the Blue Line 3,000 times, the Blue Line that the representative of Israel seems to cherish so much. This is a farce. Did Israel not kill Count Bernadotte, the peace envoy? These are facts that are well known and require no reply.

When Syria looks in the mirror, and when Arabs look at themselves in the mirror, they see only a noble history and a civilization that promoted the development of humanity. Our region is the birthplace of humanity and civilization. Let Israel look in the mirror. It will only see its victims. Not a single Palestinian home has escaped Israel missiles, bullets and destruction. Half a million Palestinian refugees live in Syria alone. One half million displaced Syrians are also in Syria. So my advice to the Israeli delegation is to look in the mirror. Look at the reality of what Israel is.

Furthermore, the statements that we heard yesterday and today stress that Israel is a country of occupation. It is the only State that is formally called an occupying State in United Nations resolutions. How can the representative of Israel look at us and say what he says? Injustice and terrorism have been perpetrated by Israel against Arabs continuously since 1948.

I would reiterate and stress that Palestinian organizations in Syria have their main headquarters in Palestinian territory. The ones in Syria are mere information offices that practise no other activities.

The entire world, particularly the developing countries, gained independence through a struggle against occupation and colonialism, and I would assure the Israeli representative that we shall not kneel either before Sharon or the Israeli army of occupation. These rights of ours will be ours again sooner or later. They are rights that are recognized by international legitimacy. We are prepared to implement the resolutions of international legitimacy, whereas Israel refuses to do so — a country that put an end to the peace process.

The rights of peoples cannot be ignored or forgotten, as Israel wishes.

Mr. Tadmoury (Lebanon) (*spoke in Arabic*): I shall be brief. I do have a few comments to make. I should like to refer the representative of Israel to the Secretary-General's reports and those of his representative in Lebanon to determine the number of breaches committed by Israel from May 2000 to September of this year. There were 2,792 such breaches, mostly by air, with Israel making supersonic

flights over Lebanese towns and villages. Is this not provocation? Is this not an incitement to terrorism?

Mr. Jacob (Israel): Listening to this debate is somewhat an Orwellian experience, where day is night and night is day, and good is bad and bad is good. Member States that are known to support terrorism, to abuse human rights, to be brutal dictatorships, have the audacity to level baseless allegations against my country, which has been for years a victim of terrorism. I trust that the international community knows better, and that these countries will be held accountable for harbouring, financing, training and supporting terrorist organizations.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.